

Something Close To Caring by ezmastarkiller

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Summary:

Steve is a little drunk at a party and tries to fight Tommy H. Billy steps in.

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Author's Note:

if you don't like harrington keep it fucking moving,
my friend

Why was he even here?

He didn't know whose house it was, he didn't like the majority of the people there, and the music was awful.

Honestly, he only came so he wouldn't be home when Neil and Susan got back from their date. But now he was thinking maybe that situation would be preferable. Anything would be preferable to this *noise*, the sweating bodies, the stale stench of beer.

But then he saw Harrington having a pretty animated argument with that kid with the freckles (Timmy?) and he knew he made the right decision to come. Steve's arms were flailing as he yelled something, his hands fluttering in the air like birds.

If you asked him, Billy would deny having known Steve would be at the party. But he did know, of course, and that fact *may* have influenced his decision. He felt like he was always following him around now like some sort of fucking puppy. Not like a stalker or anything weird. He just took advantage of knowing where Steve would be and when. He would conveniently show up at the same place, just to see him or be around him or something, he didn't really know.

It had been months since the incident between them but they had an unspoken truce. It was expressed when they made eye contact one day after the fact, in English where Steve was wont to pay attention to anything but his work. Steve had caught his eye, face still cut and discolored and without even speaking, Billy knew he somehow said too much. He had this awful thought that said he cringed at the wounds on Steve's face, maybe he even looked sorry.

He realized he was staring. He looked away, eyes roaming over the crowd before he understood it didn't matter; everyone was staring. Steve had the kid by his collar, pressed to a china cabinet as he yelled in his face. The kid shoved Steve and he stumbled backward, but quickly recovered and got ready to throw a punch.

Billy stepped in before it could escalate.

“Oh, you’re really gonna get it now, Harrington!”

“Can it, Freckles,” Billy snapped and watched the boy’s mouth clamp shut. He turned to Steve, who was baring his teeth like some kind of bloodthirsty animal. “You. Why don’t you take a breather?” He said it more as an order, gripping him by the shoulder.

Steve didn’t look away from Freckles, but tried to move out of his grip and toward the aggressor, but Billy gripped him tighter and steered him outside. Steve shook his hand off and went out of his own accord. Everyone else lost interest quick and went back to dancing.

Steve headed to a big tree in the backyard, muttering to himself the

whole way. Billy followed, a bit unsure of what to do, not knowing why he was following him at all. Because he cared, unfortunately. Or something close to caring.

“God, that fuckin’ asshole,” Steve grumbled, pressing his hip to the tree. “No fucking respect.”

“What was that about, anyway?”

Steve’s eyes moved over to Billy’s face and landed there, a glimmer passing in his eyes like he was just now actually seeing him. “Oh, hey, Hargrove,” he grinned as he slapped Billy’s shoulder. “When’d you get here, man?”

“I’ve been here for a while,” Billy said and marveled at the changeability of Drunk Steve.

“Why didn’t you come say hi to me?” Steve demanded.

Billy just shrugged. “Maybe you forgot, but we’re not exactly friends, so.”

Steve made a face. “What? I’m friends with everybody!”

“Not with Freckles, though,” Billy pointed out and couldn’t help smirking.

Steve grimaced. “Definitely not.”

They were silent for a while and Billy thought that that was the longest conversation they’d ever had. After a few minutes of Steve muttering to himself and kicking the base of the tree, he began dancing to the music they could hear pulsing from inside. It started as simple swaying, which turned into flamboyantly flipping his hands around, which evolved into him moving like a maniac and singing the lyrics way off key. Billy just watched in amazement.

Steve stumbled, falling into Billy’s chest. “Sorry,” he muttered, straightening himself out again. He resumed dancing.

Something about the sight reminded Billy of what’s been nagging him. He figured now was his only chance. He cleared his throat. “Hey, Harrington?” Steve looked at Billy expectantly, brows raised, eyes heavy after a night of drinking. “Can I ask you a question?”

“That is a question,” Steve slurred and laughed at his own dumb joke. He propped himself against the tree, apparently having tired himself out.

Billy rolled his eyes. But then he looked down and his voice lowered, barely above a whisper. “I just wanted to know what happened with you and...that Wheeler chick, or whatever.” God, why was he now so soft? Their fight had flipped some switch inside him.

Steve stilled. “Nancy. You want to know why Nancy and I broke up?”

He eyed Billy skeptically.

“Fuck, I guess so. Yeah.”

Steve shrugged. His expression was contemplative. If he were sober, he wouldn’t even consider telling him, let alone coming out here alone with him, Billy knew that. But Steve had been drinking and couldn’t stop the words that fell out of his mouth. “Dunno. She didn’t love me, or something. She loves Jonathan now.”

Billy thought that over. “Did you love her?”

Steve’s head swiveled to look at him, but he turned too fast and made himself dizzy. “Man, why are you asking me about this?” He groaned, rubbing his temples. He sighed and continued anyway. “I cared about her. A lot. I still do.”

Billy didn’t respond. He didn’t know what to make of that answer. He didn’t know how he felt about it and he didn’t know why he cared so damn much.

A stretch of silence passed between them before Steve spoke again, unbidden. “But I don’t think I really loved her. I thought I oughta love her but I never felt...” he trailed off, physically grasping for the right words, pretty hands stretched in the cold night air. “I-I don’t know. I wanted to love her but I just wasn’t able to.”

Billy perked up at this. “No? Huh.”

Steve looked at him sharply. “What?”

Billy leaned next to Steve against the tree and crossed his arms. “I just find that interesting, ‘s’all.”

“Oh, really? You find my misery interesting? Typical. You know, if it were you, I would never-“

“Shut the fuck up, Harrington,” Billy laughed, putting his hand over Steve’s mouth to shut him up. “If you asked the people in that house if you seemed miserable, I bet you they’d all say, ‘fuck no.’” He removed his hand from Steve’s mouth.

Steve was pouting. “Well, I don’t always show it...”

Billy gave him a look but decided not to press him about it. There was something else he was interested in knowing. “What I was gonna say is, it’s interesting that a guy like you couldn’t love a girl like her.”

Steve narrowed his eyes. “What the hell do you mean?”

“Well, this Natalie-“

“Nancy.”

“-Nancy is nice, right? I mean, she’s pretty, she’s smart, she’s cool, I’m assuming. And you’re you,” Billy hoped he could get away with it, hoped Steve was too drunk to catch it. “I mean, she’s good. Isn’t that how it’s all supposed to happen? You two eventually getting married and having kids...isn’t that what you want?”

“Sure,” Steve mumbled, chin lowering to his chest.

“So why couldn’t you love her, Harrington? Since she’s so perfect and all.” Billy knew he was projecting his own frustrations onto Steve but he couldn’t stop. Especially now that he had a chance, when Steve was too drunk to pick up on what he was actually saying.

“I don’t know, man, what the hell? Sometimes relationships don’t work, you know? It doesn’t really matter, Jesus,” Steve answered him in a rush of anger. He looked down at his nails, his hands trembling in the cold.

Billy wanted to just reach out and hold those hands, to warm them, but he didn’t. He was always resisting him. Always trailing after him yet constantly resisting him.

“Alright,” Billy breathed, watching his breath travel through the icy air like smoke. “You’re right, y’know? Doesn’t matter.”

“Exactly, so...”

“Forget it,” Billy dismissed the conversation.

In the silence, Billy’s mind raced, berating himself.

What were you hoping for? For Steve to say, ‘well it didn’t work because I’m actually a queer and I’ve got the hots for you, Hargrove,’ or maybe even, ‘I know you’re queer and you know what? That’s alright with me?’ Were you hoping he’d ask about you? That he would care? Pathetic.

The sound of Steve’s clattering teeth brought Billy back to reality. Steve was rubbing his hands together vigorously, shivering in his thin jacket which did nothing to help his situation. *Dummy.*

“Here,” Billy gave in, ripping his jean jacket off and helping Steve into it. Steve immediately shoved his hands into the deep pockets, tucking his face into the popped collar. Billy tried to keep his face passive even though the sight of Steve in his jacket made him want to melt a little bit.

Billy guided Steve toward the house with a hand on his back, but he wasn’t very good at it because he let Steve veer off from the path to the door. Steve leaned up against the house, felt around in Billy’s pockets some more, and came out with a pack of cigarettes and his Zippo.

“Hey,” Billy warned. “Those are mine.”

“I know,” Steve muttered, retrieving a cigarette and attempting to

light it. But his hands wouldn't hold still and the flame wouldn't meet the tip, so Billy took it from him and lit it himself. "Thanks."

"Don't you want to go back in?"

Steve blew a plume of smoke at him and shook his head defiantly. Billy sighed. Steve gave him a weird look.

"What?" Billy insisted, but Steve only cocked his head further.
"Wha-"

Steve put the cigarette to Billy's lips, effectively cutting him off.

Drunk Steve.

Billy said nothing, did nothing to show that Steve's fingers splayed across his mouth made him feel kind of woozy. He just took a drag and held it in his lungs as long as he could. Steve smirked and put it to his own mouth.

"What was that for?" Billy asked, releasing the smoke.

Steve shrugged. "You needed it."

Billy just stared at him; questioning a drunk person's actions was

futile.

They kept that up for a while, Steve taking a drag before he put his icy fingertips to Billy's mouth, prompting him to inhale. The silence they shared was comfortable, though the thumping of the music and the buzz of conversation inside was loud enough for both of them to get lost in.

"I prefer the silence," Steve suddenly spoke up, taking the last drag of the cig before flicking it to the wet grass and stomping it out. "Cause, ya know," he shifted from foot to foot, "there's, uh, too much—" he pointed to his head, cringing, "-too much. Noise, I mean. I can never focus. So. I prefer the quiet."

"Yeah. I get it." Billy tried to offer a smile, but it was hard. He reached toward Steve into his jacket and procured his cigarettes and lighter. "I like the quiet."

Steve was looking at him now, and his eyes were a little too intense for Billy to handle. So he looked at his feet, though he still felt Steve's gaze.

Steve shivered again, wrapping his arms around himself.

"You should really go back inside," Billy insisted, cigarette dangling from his mouth.

Steve shook his head. "No, no. You can take me home. You can take

me home, right? You're not, y-you haven't, you know. Drinking or whatever. Right?"

"Right," Billy confirmed. "Fine, alright. Come on."

Billy walked around the side of the house, forgetting whose it was and not caring anyway, leading Steve to his car.

In the car, Steve couldn't get his seatbelt buckled because he was laughing too hard at literally nothing. Billy helped him, shaking his head in reluctant admiration.

"Holy shit, Harrington, what did you drink?"

"I don't even know but I guess it was too much." He rubbed his eye with the back of his hand and yawned. "Mind if I puke?"

Billy turned sharply. "Swear to God, if you puke in my car, your life will end tonight."

Steve just giggled at that, his head lolling to one side. The warm light in his car highlighted Steve's jaw, casting shadows on his neck and Billy had to force his eyes ahead of himself.

Billy cranked the heat and Steve gave him directions to his house. Barely five minutes in and Steve was asleep. Well, nearly asleep. He was battling unconsciousness in favor of humming along to every

song that came on the radio, occasionally belting out a lyric in his hoarse voice. Billy hated that it didn't piss him off.

Eventually, they rolled into Steve's driveway. Billy didn't comment on how big Steve's house was.

"Alright, dipshit."

Steve was slow to unbuckle himself. He stopped before he grabbed the door and looked at Billy with his head cocked.

"Goodbye, pretty boy," Billy said impatiently. "This is your house, right?"

"Oh, yeah," Steve turned and looked at his front door. He turned back and smiled, eyes barely open. "I just wanted to thank you."

"Welcome," Billy grumbled.

But Steve didn't get out. He blinked, slowly, and then leaned toward Billy. "You have something on your face," Steve said, squinting.

Billy's heart rate spiked as Steve took him by the chin and turned his face. He watched Steve carefully as he focused on wiping his cheek with his thumb. Steve stopped and said in a low voice, "there's actually nothing on your face."

“Figured,” Billy was surprised he was able to use his voice.

And then Steve closed the distance and pressed his cold lips to Billy’s warm mouth and Billy was too shocked to close his eyes or even breathe. He wanted to enjoy it, to take Steve’s wrist and keep that hand on his jaw, but he was too awestruck, and then Steve pulled away. Steve pecked his lips one last time.

“Thanks,” Steve mumbled, smirking with his eyes closed. He opened the door and rushed out and into his house, only stumbling a little bit.

It was probably a solid minute before Billy could pick his jaw up from the floor and drive away.

He just wanted to. He wanted to. Scream. So he did; he screamed and sped down the street.

He couldn’t quite assess his own feelings. But the best way to describe it was: floating. He felt as though he was floating above his car, but not like he was flying. Like he was staying atop warm water.

His heart rate did slow down after a while and he let up on the gas. Sparks danced across his lips, he felt warm all over.

He smiled.